



FACT SHEET

BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

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South Dakota Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision

FACT SHEET: Livestock Grazing

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The South Dakota Field Office is responsible for administering livestock grazing on BLM-administered surface across the planning area with the majority of grazing authorizations occurring throughout western South Dakota and two in Brule County in eastern South Dakota. These BLM-administered lands are usually intermingled with private and state lands, which are grazed as one unit.

The SDFO administers 504 grazing allotments comprising approximately 270,000 public acres and 73,800 public animal unit months (AUMs). Of the 504 allotments in the planning area, 21 are prioritized as “I” category, 55 are in the “M” category and 428 are in the “C” category. I and M category allotments have higher management emphasis than C category allotments. C category allotments include smaller tracts of public land that are intermingled with private lands and are usually managed similar to adjacent lands. The number of acres in allotments by category are approximately 37,200 acres in I category allotments, 125,850 acres in M category allotments, and 106,850 acres in C category allotments.

Cattle, which are generally cow-calf pairs (calves are sold at weaning) and sheep are the predominant class of livestock authorized. Most yearlings are replacement heifers. According to the Rangeland Administration System, permitted allocations include 423 for cattle, 27 for sheep, 42 sheep and cattle, nine bison and three horse allotments. A few of the allotments may have horses along with other livestock types and three of the bison allotments have cattle in addition to bison.

The Missouri River Basin Studies in the 1960s and early 1970’s provided the data to initiate conservative stocking rate levels on BLM-administered public land in South Dakota. Since the completion of these studies, stocking rates have been set at very conservative levels to maintain or improve plant vigor and to provide adequate cover for wildlife and watershed protection. Approximately 72 percent of the annual forage production on public land in the planning area is allocated for wildlife and watershed protection.

Rangeland Health

In 1997, the Montana/Dakotas BLM State Director approved the *Montana/Dakotas Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management* (Standards). The Standards for Rangeland Health are described below.

- Standard 1: Uplands are in PFC (Proper Functioning Condition) for site specific conditions of climate, soils and parent material.
- Standard 2: Riparian areas and wetlands are in PFC for site specific conditions of climate, soils and parent material.
- Standard 3: Water quality meets assigned state water quality standard.
- Standard 4: Air quality meets State air quality standard.
- Standard 5: Habitats are maintained and/or restored, where appropriate, for healthy, productive and diverse populations of native plant and animal species.

Guidelines for grazing management are provided to maintain or improve resource conditions in upland and riparian habitats available to livestock grazing. The SDFO has completed the initial assessment of all of its allotments in relation to the Standards. Over 90% of the allotments assessed were meeting standards at the time of the assessment. Only two percent of public land was found to be not meeting standards as a result of livestock grazing practices and corrective actions have been taken on these allotments.

If Standards for Rangeland Health are not met and livestock grazing determined to be the causal factor, regulation directs the authorized officer to implement actions (e.g., permit modifications, range improvement projects) prior to the next grazing season that will move the allotment towards meeting the Standards for Rangeland Health (43 CFR 4180). Grazing lease modifications include changing season of use, changing type of livestock, addressing carrying capacity and directing salt or mineral placement. In the majority of cases, significant improvement in rangeland conditions have been documented on allotments not meeting standards due to livestock grazing practices.

Rangeland Monitoring

The BLM conducts rangeland monitoring to determine compliance with the Standards (or progress toward these standards) or Allotment Management Plan objectives. If monitoring indicates that progress is occurring, or standards and objectives are being met, management continues.

However, if progress is not shown, management adjustments are required to be made prior to the start of the next grazing season. Adjustments are made by agreement or decision through consultation, cooperation, and coordination with leasees and the interested public in accordance with legislation, regulation and policy.